

# Humanist Viewpoints

NEWSLETTER OF THE HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NSW INC.



Volume 48

Number 3

Jul/Aug/Sept 09

**PLEASE REMEMBER TO  
RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP  
BY JULY**

## 2009 AUSTRALIAN HUMANIST ACHIEVERS OF THE YEAR

Members of Victorian Humanist Society



Maureen  
MacPhate  
Past Hon. Sec.  
HumSocVictoria



Alan  
MacPhate  
AH Past  
President

## 2009 AHOYs AUSTRALIAN HUMANISTS OF THE YEAR Julian Burnside AO QC, and Kate Durham



**Julian Burnside OA QC**  
(photo: Institute of Legal Studies)  
Refugee Activist with wife Kate Durham



**AH CONVENTION DINNER:**  
l-r Affie Adagio, John August (President HumSocNSW),  
Julian Burnside (2009 AHOY) and Ann Young



**Kate Durham**  
Refugee Activist and Artist

**HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NSW  
2009 AGM  
Humanist House  
1.30 pm Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> August**

**HuVAT (Humanist Viewpoints Afternoon Talk) 4pm 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday each month**

**4pm July – Clive Porabou: *Women and the Land in a Melanesian Culture***

**1.30 for 2pm start August – AGM**

**4pm Sept – John August: *An Economic Synthesis***

*Opportunity for Humanists to socialise together over refreshments*

**HUMANIST SOCIETY OF NSW WEBSITE**  
<http://www.hsnsw.asn.au/>

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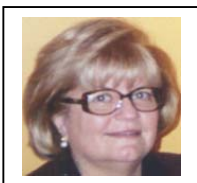
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## **EDITOR/HON SEC COMMENTS**

*Affie Adagio*

### **AH (CAHS) CONVENTION Adelaide May 2009**

The AGM was well organised and interesting. John August reports fully on the Convention in his article



**Hon Anne Levy** presented the **AHOY** certificates to Julian Burnside QC (Kate Durham was not present due to family commitments). He spoke on their activist work, especially filling us in on Kate's contribution.

**Julian Burnside**, Barrister: In recognition of his active commitment to human rights, particularly his willingness to take on the cases of asylum seekers, pro bono, and his eloquent public advocacy of rights of refugees. He is commended for his courageous public stand when championing human rights in Australia was at a very low point. Joint Award with Kate Durham.

**Kate Durham**, Artist: In recognition of her dedicated support for human rights, through such practical assistance as the successful Spare Rooms for Refugees project, and by the use of her creative artistry with paint and film to show the often tragic consequences of human rights violations such as the *Tampa* incident, which touched the consciences of Australians. Joint award with Julian Burnside.

### **2009 AUSTRALIAN HUMANIST ACHIEVERS OF THE YEAR**

This award went to **Alan and Maureen MacPhate** who have been contributing their efforts for the Humanist Society for many years. Maureen as an Office Bearer on HumSocVic and Alan as Chairperson of CAHS Executive. Roslyn Ives presented these awards to them at the AH dinner.

On Sunday there was a full program consisting of speakers from 12.00 to 3.30

**SPEAKERS** on following topics were...

**INCOME:** Mark Henley (Uniting Care Wesley)

**SHELTER:** Bill Manallack (Housing Legal Clinic)

Sally Langton (Unity House)

**HEALTH:** Dr. Ingo Weber

George Seabrook & Dr Ian Butfield (HSSA) "World Health" (Dignity for Sufferers of Chronic Pain)

**JUSTICE:** John Rolls (Human Rights Coalition)  
Summing Up Julian Burnside QC

Many thanks to the HumSocSA Branch for a most enjoyable event.

### **HCN REPORT**

I have accepted the appointment of Convenor of Humanist Celebrant Network Caretaker Committee until such time as certain issues are resolved. There are at present over 20 members and there is much brainstorming taking place. Many thanks to Pat Bowles for taking on the role of Moderator and running the website and internet discussion group. Also to Charles Foley who has done so much and continues to represent HCN with the Attorney General's Dept. There are others who are on the Caretaker Committee such as Christine Counsel Dally Messenger and Rona Goold, Ann Young and Susanne Hurst. The Humanist Society of NSW sponsored the HCN originally and is regarded as the inspiration for HCN.

### **UNAANSW AGM REPORT**

I attended the UNAANSW AGM together with John August, Waratah Gillespie, Ann Young and Ian Jones from HumSocNSW. I have once more been elected to their Executive Committee. There is a report of this AGM in this edition.

### **WILPF UNSCR 1325 REPORT**

I attended together with Waratah a meeting 29<sup>th</sup> May held by WILPF to discuss the UNSCR 1325 process so far. This Resolution "Women, Peace and Security" which we had as part of the Bougainville Seminar in Parliament House, was passed on October 31, 2000 and is the first UN Resolution that specifically highlights the impact of war and conflict on women and girls, and the importance of women's involvement in peacebuilding processes. It is a commitment made by the UN and a platform from which individuals, non-government organizations, governments and international institutions can advocate for the inclusion of women in all aspects of conflict, peace and security.

## **UN SECRETARY-GENERAL MESSAGE**

### **MESSAGE ON WORLD DAY TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION AND DROUGHT 17 June 2009**

Desertification and land degradation affect one third of the Earth's surface, threatening the livelihoods, well-being and development of as many as 1 billion people. Faced with long periods of drought, famine and deepening poverty, many have only one option: flight from the land. There are already an estimated 24 million environmentally induced migrants. That number could rise to 200 million by 2050. This year's observance of the World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought highlights the growing threat to national and regional stability posed by desertification. Nearly one-third of the world's cropland has become unproductive and been abandoned in the past 40 years. Almost three-quarters of rangelands show various symptoms of desertification. Climate change is a contributing factor, but not the only one. In particular, we must reconsider our agricultural practices and how we

manage our water resources. Agriculture and the raising of livestock account for 70 per cent of freshwater use and as much as 80 per cent of deforestation. Growing demand for crops for animal feed and biofuels will put further pressure on these scarce resources if not managed sustainably. Current global consumption and production patterns are unsustainable. The consequences will include further global food crises, such as we saw in 2008, and continued desertification, land degradation and periods of drought. As usual, the poor will be the first victims and the last to recover. The recently concluded seventeenth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development stressed that desertification and land degradation are global problems that require a global response. In December, world leaders can provide such a response when they meet in Copenhagen to seal a deal on climate change. A comprehensive and equitable agreement to slow down global warming must also help developing countries to adapt to the impacts that are already under way. In particular, it must provide adequate and predictable financing to support improved land management, more efficient water use and sustainable agriculture. On this World Day to Combat Desertification and Drought, let us recognize the security risks of letting desertification advance unchecked. Let us also recognize that by combating climate change we can help to reverse desertification, increase agricultural productivity, alleviate poverty and enhance global security.

## **PRESIDENT REPORT**

*John August*

### **2009 CAHS Convention:**

Ann Young, Affie Adagio and I recently attended the 2009 Australian Humanists Convention (CAHS) in Adelaide.



This year we had joint Australian Humanists of the Year (AHOY) - Julian Burnside QC, and Kate Durham. Kate was unable to attend the presentation due to family obligations so Julian told us about his and Kate's initiatives to look after refugees, including the "spare rooms for refugees" project, helping asylum seekers to enter the Australian community. Julian was very friendly in circulating and talking to people after the talk. Julian is one of the intellectual players in today's world - there are politicians, academics, activists - and also lawyers.

**Bill of Rights:** Julian spoke in favour of a Bill of Rights - at the business meetings, which was passed

NSW alone voted against supporting a Bill of Rights as decided by the special meeting in February here in Sydney

The other states were surprised. It's something I have mixed feelings about. The original motion was a bit sparse on detail of just how having a Bill of Rights would correct prior injustices - something the Victorians did acknowledge. Still, I'm generally sympathetic to such a Bill. I see the formal acknowledgement of generally acknowledged rights as doing good in correcting injustices which result from such rights having no formal status. I see this good as exceeding any harm by supposedly limiting rights (though the Bill could include a clause that '*in recognising these rights, we do not deny the possibility of other rights requiring acknowledgement, be they in a Bill of Rights or otherwise*'). I have some concern about opening up opportunities for lawyers - I don't mean throwing lawyers at a problem really fixes it - but hopefully the existence of such a Bill would, without the need for legal intervention - cause changes. Regardless, I acknowledge the willingness of members to attend and express themselves at the relevant meetings. Whatever the particular decisions, this suggests a healthy democratic interest in the Society. In any case, Affie plans the...

October HuVAT to have Waratah put forward a case for Bill of Rights in relation to Human Rights and allow discussion.

**Other motions were carried at the Convention** - including our one supporting the Atheist Foundation in their push to have advertising on buses. That's something we'll have to follow up with the Australian Humanists committee.

**2010 AH Convention:** We also met up with Maria Proctor, the new President of the Queensland Humanists, where the next Australian Humanist Convention will be held. I've been developing myself as a spoken word performer, and will be performing at this next convention.

**Talks/Presentations:** There were also presentations on many different topics. I was intrigued by Dean Dowling's "Injustice of the Drug Laws". The drug which causes greatest harm is alcohol. That's a no brainer - there's a lot more people taking alcohol than any other drug. Dean noted that alcohol has a greater tendency to make you violent, compared to pot; some challenged this, citing concerns about pot causing schizophrenic episodes. Still, are these people who are medicating a prior condition, or can we really say that pot has caused it? Assuming there is a connection, how do we compare the violence caused by the different drugs? A schizophrenic episode resulting in death may be more spectacular than a drink driving fatal accident, but it's not more harmful. It still seems to me the attention given to drugs like pot is disproportionate to the harm caused. A more interesting, somewhat broader question is - what proportion of casual users become "problem users" for the two drugs, leaving aside how you assess what a "problem user" is? I don't know the answer, but it

would be an interesting answer to know (**Affie is planning such a HuVAT in November perhaps**).

**Ethical Education:** We also heard about Victoria's progress in getting Ethical Education in schools. Harry Gardner has prepared a syllabus, they're currently revising it to meet the requirements of the Victorian Education Department; we'll see how it goes. We have been getting some enquiries from concerned parents in Sydney on this topic; it is clearly something we need to develop.

**Environmental Issues:** I listened somewhat sympathetically to some presentations on environmental issues, but was left wondering about details. How meaningful is it to say that there are an "equivalent number of earths" consumed to provide our lifestyle, when it represents a **'combination'** of consumption of renewables, non-renewables, and agriculture? I see a lot of tension between various environmental viewpoints - and also different economic slants. While we would endorse the freedom of individuals to pursue their own work and express themselves, such notional freedoms are usually taken advantage of by large corporations. Copyright is used by large record companies rather than individual performers. Patents are used by large corporations in a big game of chess; in comparison, the backyard inventor makes little use of them. The wealthy can convert wealth to power and influence, altering the game rather than just playing in it. And while we ought as individuals have the freedom to gamble and take drugs, large corporate entities target our psychological weaknesses to sell stuff to us, rather than nobly enable our freedoms. Developing these thoughts, I'm planning to give a **HuVAT in September, "An economic synthesis": trying to look at these competing elements of the environmental and economic view, and making some sense of it.**

**Happy Human booklet:** I also presented the new version of the Happy Human that I've been working on in consultation with others. Everyone in attendance from the other States had seen it earlier and were enthusiastic about it. Within Sydney, I've had endorsements from David Tribe - and also Robin Holliday, a retired molecular biologist and speaker at a previous Darwin Day event. Robin was happy with the views on creationism and intelligent design.

At the **June HuVAT I gave a talk on the Hebrew Bible** - we hope to have a summary of the talk in a future issue of Humanist Viewpoints.

#### **HUMAN RIGHTS - SOMETHING TO DIE FOR?**

*Waratah Rosemary Gillespie*

**Some people do.** From Thailand to Tibet to Timbuktu, from Socrates to Steve Biko, the struggle for enlightenment and human rights – against those who abuse their power and privilege – continues.



The Magna Carta, England's oldest surviving human rights document, was designed to stop King John from abusing his power while his brother Richard was away fighting the crusades. During the Apartheid era in South Africa, Steve Biko, author of "I Write What I Like", was killed in custody.

More recently, an estimated 17,000 Bougainvilleans died during a long struggle to protect their land and environment for future generations, for their right to self determination and independence. I was shot at and nearly killed while crossing the military blockade of Bougainville in 1992. (See "Running with Rebels" Chapter One)

For those men and women whose rights are violated, human rights is more than an intellectual debate – it is a burning issue, one which can make the difference between life or death.

The Humanist Society of New South Wales has taken up the invitation to contribute to the national Human Rights Consultation. Our submission focused on Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Conviction, Freedom from Racial Discrimination, and more.

Realising that there is a great deal of misunderstanding about human rights in Australia, the NSW branch of the Humanist Society has made the following recommendation:

That the federal government provides funding for eligible community, state and national organisations to engage in community education on human rights issues.

Such activities could include:

- Organising community forums
- Seeking invitations to speak at meetings of local community groups
- Where possible, talks with high school students and upper level primary students
- Cooperation with other organizations involved in education about human rights

#### **A THANK YOU FROM JOANNE**

Joanne Dateransi, who visited Australia in March, arrived safely in Bougainville. Speaking by mobile telephone, Joanne thanked the members of the Humanist Society of NSW for organising her visit to Australia. "Thank you for everything," she said. Since her return Joanne has been working with grassroots women and set up an organisation to represent the women landowners. On 16 June, many women came together and established the Bougainville Women Landowners Association. Joanne was elected President and Lynette Ona (no relation to Francis Ona) was elected Vice President. The Bougainville Women Landowners Association has the full support



of James Tanis, President of the Autonomous Bougainville Government.

While in Australia, Joanne spoke to the NSW Humanist Society of NSW, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom of NSW, the United Nations Association of Australia NSW, and many other organisations as she could fit in before leaving for Brisbane on 10 April at one in the morning because for some inexplicable reason the Immigration Department issued her with only a one month visa when they were advised that her speaking itinerary required a three month visa. Arbitrary restrictions placed on her visa made it impossible for her to extend her visit – or even appeal in a court of law the Department's apparently irrational decision. As the law now stands Joanne could not even appeal to the Minister of Immigration. Such is the unfettered power of bureaucrats in the Immigration Department under the present state of the law. Justice and human rights have been overridden and we are stuck with it.

While in Australia, Joanne spoke to the "*Illawarra Mercury*"...

"In Bougainville, in the area where I come from, women are the landowners and the land is passed down from mothers to daughters. Women make the decisions (about the land) and men are there to protect women. The land is very important to my people. We depend on the land – it is like a mother to us. But the mining company (Bougainville Copper Limited, a subsidiary of Rio Tinto Zinc) made so much destruction to the environment...If the mine reopens there will be more problems and the war will start again, and we have had enough of that"

Clive Porabou, a singer, songwriter and film maker, has applied for a visa to enter Australia. He is scheduled to speak at the July HuVAT and we hope he does not encounter the difficulties Joanne had to face. Clive will speak on "*Women and the Land of Mekamui*" (Mekamui is the Indigenous name for Bougainville) at Humanist House, 10 Shepherd Street Chippendale on Sunday 12<sup>th</sup> July at 4.00pm (Supper is provided after the talk).

## **PAID PART-TIME WORK**

*Ann Young*

There is scope for members to expand their voluntary work with paid assistance, or to become the paid assistance, or both. If you are interested in 4 hours paid work, or more, a week, a meeting will be held before the AGM at noon 9<sup>th</sup> August to play with ideas (including below). Come if you have ideas about how it could be financed, but don't want to do the work. Come if you want to work but don't have any ideas. You must RSVP before 18<sup>th</sup> July 92 111 303 or I won't come.



### Organization 1: Humanist H.E.A.R.T. Inc.

In November 2003, on behalf of the Humanist Society of NSW an organization was set up called Humanist HEART Inc whose objective is:

"To provide financial and other assistance to those in need of services in Health, Health Education, Education, Food, and Welfare in Australia and overseas, with particular emphasis on family planning, sex education, AIDS prevention, and maternal welfare."

The organisation is not intended to implement the work merely to raise funds and pass them to other NGOs which implement similar objectives such as FPA or Preterm. The original intention was that Humanists would be seen to do good works whereas at present our donations are not identifiable as Humanist.

Humanist HE ART (Health, Education And Resource Transfer) has a set of rules and is incorporated, it has an executive of respected individuals including a Treasurer, a Deputy Treasurer and an auditor.

### Organization 2: Reasons Incorporated

In November, 2003 on behalf of the Humanist Society of NSW an organisation was set up called Humanist Reasons Incorporated whose objective is to provide funds for Humanist Education in government schools.

It is unlikely that this organization will ever be granted "charity" status so it will have to be self-funding and run paid courses, and sell products like books and videos.

### Paid Work

To join either of the above organizations you must be a Humanist member.

Job 1: (Not paid) Find a lawyer who will write a trust deed for Humanist HEART pro bono so that donations become tax-deductible to the giver.

Job 2 : (may be paid) you raise the funds to pay for the work you do (rate set by the Board).

Example 1: You decide to have a Humanist HEART day. (Hope you will think of something unique.) You find volunteer collectors; you provide the hearts, receipts, badges etc; you do PR; you document and deposit all donations. The Board pays you a pittance. The following year your pittance increases.

Example 2: You run a HEART introduction agency and hold a social function on St Valentine's Day, 2 days before Darwin Day, to raise money. You are paid a fee by the Board.

Example 3: You run Vicki's Pocket by adding a small commission to the price of an early abortion to pay Preterm. Then recoup the money over time from the patient.

**WORDS AND IDEAS**

The response to David Tribe's article, which was serialised in Vpts, has been exceptional. Therefore we are now preparing the complete booklet which will be available for sale according to David's generous offer to become a fundraiser for HumSocNSW. It should be read within 2 months so do watch out for it.



**UNAANSW AGM 21<sup>st</sup> June**

*Lynne Chevor*

We give a special thanks to our Returning Officer, JOHN AUGUST, President of the Humanist Society of NSW, along with the scrutineers, Lindsay Mell and Geordie McNabney.



Dr. Peter Airey was re-elected as President. Geoffrey Little and Dianne Sackelariou were re-elected as Vice Presidents (2). The Treasurer is Anne Pickworth. The Executive also now consists of Dr. Affie Adagio, Geordie McNabney, Lindsay Mell (ex-officio as past President), Bianca Pace, Franklin Scarf, Dr. Van Thieu Nguyen, Valerie Weekes as well as the Chairpersons of the Branches: Central Coast/Hunter/Blue Mountains and UNYA President and Vice President. The Secretary was co-opted and the *News & Notes Editor(s)* to be confirmed at the next Executive meeting.



There were 24 members, 3 guests (Dr Sister Coyle-speaker, Paul Hennessy (Auditor), John August-Returning Officer) and 3 visitors

**SPECIAL RESOLUTION - Proposed Changes to the Constitution**

**Change 1 - Approved** Term of President and Vice-Presidents limited to three (3) consecutive years

**Change 3 - Approved**...encourage like-minded organisations such as UNIFEM, UNHCR, UNICEF, Ministry for Peace to join ... as co-opted members...

**ABORIGINAL ART AND AUSTRALIA**

*John August*

Australian Aboriginal Art is much sought after internationally, but Australians overall and Aborigines themselves benefit little from it. Gordon Syron is an Aboriginal artist who understands the market better than most, having run an art gallery in conjunction with his partner Elaine. It's a closed shop - particularly for Aborigines.

Gordon: "the whites have stolen our land - and now they're trying to steal from our culture as well."



Internationally, Italians and Greeks are involved in their art and sculpture, but Australian Aborigines are not involved in the selling of their art. It's partly the vestiges of a "Mission Mentality" - of "telling the black fellas what to do", but it's certainly a good earner for those involved. It's about productive Aborigines claiming a fairer share of the value they create. Gordon thinks that just as Australia "rode on the sheep's back", it has also "ridden on the black's back" - with unwaged Aborigines working as stockmen to even have that wool based wealth. So what is the total value of all the Aboriginal art produced in the last few decades? How much stayed in Australia? How much stayed in Aboriginal hands? How many Aboriginal groups have been able to preserve and show their own art?

In addition, though, it seems that very little has remained in Australia - with international art dealers denying not just Aborigines, but also the Australian economy, of almost all of that value (To be fair, in the 1990s the Australian Government prohibited the export of art worth in excess of \$20,000 without paying tax.)

Some "dealers", who Syron calls the "Carpetbaggers", tour the outback and (for example) buy art for \$300 that they sell at overseas auctions for up to \$30,000. At one stage Syron was circulating, buying art on a much more honest "advance-plus-commission" basis.

The "Carpetbaggers" were not impressed - one said to Syron that he could get shot saying what he did. Syron said he did record the conversation because he'd had personal experience of the homicide squad. Syron had previously served a life sentence in prison.

Syron learned to paint in prison, reproducing the masters (he also learnt some tip from forgers, too). These "original copies" are much appreciated, and rarely sold publicly, though owners do sporadically Surface to verify authenticity.

His signature work, inspired by his experience, is "Judgement By His Peers" - a white person in the dock is surrounded by black figures with a golliwog-like appearance - some are half paying attention to the case - others seem to gossiping. Who appreciates art ? Private collectors keep it for themselves and speculators buy it just to sell it later ? Either way, unless loaned to galleries, it's kept out of the public eye. And apart from speculators, some dealers manipulate the market to inflate prices.

In times past, Elaine Syron took early morning photographs of Aboriginal paintings when they made their ephemeral stop in Sydney Galleries on their way overseas, probably becoming lost forever. It was her attempt to keep some record of that art in Australia.

Gordon's art has a biting, satirical style, and was initially difficult to sell - no galleries would provide a private exhibit. They were displayed publicly in the NSW Parliament House - the "Aboriginal Deaths in Custody Exhibition" - but this was not a selling exhibition. So Elaine opened her own Gallery in order to show Syron's work. Things did change. Gordon's work entered the mainstream and started to sell. Over the years, Gordon's work has mellowed (he is now 67). Before 2000, his works focused on "Invasion Day" and similar themes. But since then, Gordon has been inspired to paint the "Aboriginal Fairies" and "Where the Wildflowers Once Grew".

"Black Fellas Dreaming Gallery" started selling work by other Aboriginal artists. And Gordon, like so many passionate artists, became reluctant about selling his best work - and then wanted to keep the better work of other Aboriginal Artists, too. He has a love-hate relationship with the market. To the extent that appreciative, passionate people can pay good money - great - even if there's the bittersweet realisation that the public probably won't ever get to see it. But seeing it dominated by speculators, market manipulators and transient international art dealers makes you feel a little ill.

To display his private collection, they started up the Bangalow gallery. There was no external support, however, and this could not be sustained.

Wanting to move their Art Gallery to the Rocks, they had several meetings with the Sydney Harbour

Foreshore Authority. The authority was keen at first, but suddenly backed out when existing Galleries became concerned about the possible competition from real Aboriginals. Competition from an Aboriginal who would have shared more of the wealth with the artists themselves, but never mind. It's a closed shop in other ways too.

There were never any Aboriginal valuers of Aboriginal Art - adding weight to the idea that "They stole our land and now they sell our culture". Still, with the help of a white valuer, Gordon is soon to become Australia's first Aboriginal valuer of Aboriginal Art.

And, being fair - some white players in Australian Aboriginal Art have been supportive. A white valuer is sponsoring Gordon's application. The Hogarth and Cooe Aboriginal Art Galleries, while they sold art overseas, were willing to let Elaine photograph it. But such beacons are in the minority. Further, all humans beings - black or white - can be corrupted by money. Gordon has seen a few Aboriginal artists "go bad" in their pursuit of money.

The Syron's collection includes cultural art - rather than the kangaroos and Emus which are the tourist mainstay, it includes representations of sexual organs and reproduction - the so called "Bunda" art. These artworks frequently tell stories with moral and sexual lessons, similar to fables. The NT artist Yirawala retains sexual organs in his work - something the white dealers wanted him to exclude. Unlike other artists, however, he refused to buck under and keep them in.

Then you have "crosshatch style" and "X-ray" art, which does have a traditional origins in Aboriginal culture.

While they have a few "dot" style artworks, they're a recent development - prompted by a non-Aboriginal, Geoffrey Bardon in 1977. It does incorporate Aboriginal influences, of course - but think about all the documentaries you've ever seen on rock paintings - you never see any "dots".

Their collection includes Aboriginal Art from all over Australia - be it contemporary art, traditional art, or cultural art that which has a story attached, or speaks of the history of the Aboriginal people - they plan to found a museum / gallery where



this art can be viewed by all Australians, a "Keeping Place" - so that rather being sold into a private collection, it can be kept in the public eye.

Gordon and Elaine's story is a fascinating one. We can only hope that more Aborigines act to wrestle control of the market for Aboriginal Art away from whites - for, in so doing, they can retain more of the wealth they generate - and perhaps "make a good living" as Gordon would put it - and further inject more of that wealth into the economy for all of us.

## **DIPLOMACY, FAITH AND FREEDOM**

*Relayed by Jonathan Marshall*

(Apr 2nd 2009 from The Economist print edition)

### **America rejoins the argument over which human rights are sacred**

BACK in February there were groans of dismay among civil-liberties activists when Hillary Clinton, in one of her early pronouncements as secretary of state, suggested that America had more important things to discuss with China than human rights. "Our pressing on those [human-rights] issues can't interfere with the global economic crisis, the global climate-change crisis and the security crisis," she said.

But on March 31st the Obama administration did something very concrete to correct any impression that diplomatic lobbying for liberty was too big a luxury in a world with other woes on its mind. In a bid to redeem a body which sceptics had called irredeemable, it announced its intention to seek one of the 47 seats on the United Nations Human Rights Council.

The council was established in 2006 in the hope that a new structure would avoid the worst flaws of its predecessor, the Human Rights Commission, where notorious dictatorships seemed to do most of the talking. Hawks in the Bush administration were unconvinced that the council would be much of an improvement, and the council has already done much to vindicate them; it has focused far more on Israel than on any other country, and it has devoted quite a lot of energy to a campaign for laws against the "defamation of religion" whose main supporters are Muslim governments with distinctly illiberal ideas about free speech.

Still, there were sighs of relief from many other Western countries when Mrs Clinton announced that her country had decided to try joining the council and making it better. New Zealand graciously withdrew its own candidacy to make room for an American bid, in a General Assembly vote that will take place in May.

A blasphemy trial in Pakistan: just whose rights are at stake? John Bolton, who served as ambassador to the

UN during the Bush administration, dismissed the American change of line as giving credibility to an agency that deserved none—or as he put it, "getting on board the Titanic after it's hit the iceberg."

Altering the council from within will be a formidable task—especially after a vote on "defamation" on March 26th which enhanced the body's reputation as an obstacle to free expression as most Westerners would understand the concept. The resolution was passed in defiance of an appeal from a remarkably broad range of secular, Christian, Muslim and Jewish groups; in a joint statement, they had argued that by denouncing the "defamation" of faith the Council would give heart to regimes that set out to "silence and intimidate human-rights activists, religious dissenters and other independent voices."

**The International Humanist and Ethical Union (IHEU)**, a lobby group which co-ordinated the appeal, says the resolution is part of an effort by Islamic governments to establish a new definition of human rights which stresses the immunity of faiths from criticism, not the protection of individuals from persecution. **Roy Brown, who represents the IHEU** in Geneva, believes the latest resolution reflects a campaign by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference to supplant the Universal Declaration on Human Rights with the "Cairo declaration" adopted by the OIC in 1990, which lays out an alternative view of liberty.

Supporters of the Cairo statement say it complements the universal one—but as human-rights wonks have noted, the Cairo document carries the huge rider that the application of all human rights should be subordinated to sharia law. It also affirms the illegitimacy of "exercising any form of pressure" on Muslims to quit their faith "for another religion or for atheism"—in terms that seem to deny the individual's freedom to change religion, and to justify the penalties for "apostasy" and blasphemy that many Muslim states impose.

An unenviable task, then, for the American diplomats who face the task of arguing back in defence of old-fashioned libertarianism. But re-engaging with the council will boost America's image in many quarters—regardless of what it decides to do about a related human-rights forum: the so-called Durban II conference on racism, due to take place in Geneva in late April.

The United States said on February 27th that it was pulling out of preparations for that event: the draft final statement was too biased against Israel to be worth discussing. The text has since been shortened and made less controversial, leaving a chance that America might rejoin. But whatever America decides about that, expect some hard arguments in Geneva and elsewhere about the nature of religious freedom.



## ***MYSTIC HUMANISM***

*Jan Tendys*

[As you will remember Jan was the long term Vpts Editor before I took on the role in 1999]

What might one mean by Mystic-Humanism, and Pagan Humanism? What could Mystic-Pagan-Humanism be?

The heart of Humanism is the reliance on reason to promote a world in which every baby born is enveloped in the full protection of the UN's Human Rights legislation, regardless of nationality, race, ethnicity, language, class, sex or sexual orientation. A big order. We are nowhere near such a happy world today. Note that there is an assumption in my definition of the heart of Humanism that emotion is part of a Humanist's life. This has to be said because some Humanists think they can be driven by reason alone. You have to care about every baby born – a very tall order when so many babies are born every minute. Most of us settle in practice for some version of “Think globally, act locally,” most of the time. To be a Humanist you also have to have a positive emotional feeling towards that abstract concept “reason”. You have to value it. I'm using reason here to mean the whole of scientific method, not just logical argument. So where could any kind of mysticism come into a Humanist's life?

According to the Compact Macquarie Dictionary, one meaning of mystic is “one who claims to attain, or believes in the possibility of attaining, insight into mysteries transcending ordinary human knowledge, as by immediate intuition in a state of spiritual ecstasy.”

Now you can forget about a lot of that as far as this Mystic-Humanist goes. No transcending ordinary human knowledge, merely the supplementing of it. No ecstasy.

The only God (for we're always talking about God) I really believe in is the God Within. Not just conscience, not just the Freudian idea of the super-ego, not even just the inner parent – the God Within is all those things. It is the small, still voice of conscience, the ability to know when you are telling lies or deceiving yourself, the imaginary friend who reasons with you and gives you good advice, the Comforter. But is the God Within supported by anything outside us? Reason cannot supply the answer to that, except to query what could be the nature of the connection. Perhaps it is more “spooky action at a distance” as Einstein described quantum phenomena. We just simply don't know whether there is such a connection. At least, we don't know in the sense of the word “knowledge” which depends on the notion of being able to be shared. We can't demonstrate any spiritual influence in the cosmos to anybody.

The connection can be something we experience, something apprehended, an intuition, a hunch that might satisfy or tease our own inner being, but not be

something you can impart to others, except perhaps by the power and influence of poetry or music or the other arts. Incidentally when I am talking about a possible connection between the God Within and the cosmos, I am not talking about any kind of supernaturalism. I am certainly not going to stand here insisting that I've got the God's-eye-view and you'd better believe it. But there are times, every now and then, when Something seeps into the edges of my existence and I feel some kind of outer, out-there-in-the-universe influence, which I suspect links up with my God Within. But, of course, it may not. The experience may be an illusion; to link it with my God Within and the Humanistic values that flow from that, may be a delusion. But I am not going to deny that the seeping-in-at-the-edges-of-existence experience does happen to me.

Does any of this have anything to do with eternal life? John Shelby Spong says that he believes God is eternal, that he has a relationship with God and that relationship may make his life eternal. That's not a quote. It is my version of something of Spong's I read.

I would like at this point to go off at a tangent and express my disapproval of an advertisement that appeared in the pages of UU World which described Spong as “anti-faith”. It was an advertisement for somebody's book. If it is not a matter of faith to believe that God exists, that you have a relationship with God, and that relationship will make you eternal – what would be an instance of faith? It is a real smear to call Spong anti-faith. That is not to say that people are not entitled to be anti-faith – they are – but when someone believes he is writing in the Christian tradition, to call his writings “anti-faith” is a smear.

Now, to return to this Mystic humanist who addresses you. I have no idea whether the Something that seeps into the edges of my existence form the Out There and which may or may not link up with the God Within is actually God. We're stuck with this word “God” apparently –is there no getting away from it? “The Sacred” is a good try. How do you like “the Seeper?” If this “Something that seeps” does exist, can I say with Spong that I know it is eternal and that I have a relationship with it? My experience of the Seeper is of something that I would automatically identify as eternal. This, as I say, is not something that one can submit to Reason. Reason just says “Experiences of seeping things at the edge of existence don't come into my domain, or at least, they don't unless you can write them up with greater specificity than this talk has shown so far.” Do I have a relationship with the Seeper or the Seeping? Maybe – it is my experience after all. Actually I don't think the Seeping is a Seeper. The Seeping only becomes a person when it greets the God Within. Whatever the Something is that I experience, it isn't the omnipotent, omniscient person who is continually adjusting this world that is presented as God by most religions. I am not at all sure what it might be. The word “ineffable” comes to mind. It is just an experience of something that seems

to endorse the valuings that make me a Humanist - what I said earlier about caring for the Human Rights of every child born.

Gilbert believes that the divine is cosmic creativity. However, the cosmos is destructive as well as creative. Evolution is destructive as well as creative. I suspect that just as Gilbert believes the arc of history bends toward justice, he believes that the arc of cosmic history bends towards creativity. That may be so, but it is a matter of faith to believe it, rather than reason. In the same way it is a matter of faith on my part to believe that my experience of the eternal is not just an illusion built into us by evolution because early in the history of our species it made for tribal bonding. However, let us just suppose that my experience is of something real. Could this greeting the eternal make me eternal as Spong argues? Here, for me, Reason does enter the arena wearing a sceptic's hat. The notion of eternal life has always struck me as something of a case of wishful thinking, to which I and all humanity are prone. You, of course, relying on your own spiritual experiences and intuitions may decide differently. So I pass on whether my relationship with the Seeping might score me life eternal. But never mind, I am more interested in being full of enthusiasm than in whether I will enthuse eternally. What should I enthuse about?

Here is where Pagan-Humanism comes in. Many people, particularly poets, who tend to have mystical experiences or 'sensations' as Einstein called them, have them out of doors. The natural world is a turn-on. Of all the strands in Unitarianism it is the earth-centred Pagans, who come into their own here. Yet, why do we think Nature is so wonderful? Isn't it a case of "Nature, red in tooth and claw" as Tennyson said? Well, according to Darwinists, it isn't entirely true that Nature is just a cruel struggle encompassing the utterly repulsive, like the hydatis parasite, since there is so much evidence of symbiosis and cooperation among living things. It's a mixed picture. Pagans, by the way, don't have to give up Reason any more than Christians do. There have been Christian-Humanists since at least Renaissance times, and the Pagans could no doubt claim there have been Pagan-Humanists even longer. Of course, the Christians can be Nature lovers too. "There lives the dearest freshness deep down things," wrote Gerard Manley Hopkins, a Roman Catholic priest who was more than a bit of a mystic. That didn't stop him from being also a bit of a bigot. We mystics are no nicer than the rest of you. Not that I can truthfully claim to be a fully fledged mystic. My experience of the Seeping isn't the overpowering experience of oneness that so many mystics describe. I can, however love the natural world, and human beings as part of that world. And I can reverence the role of Reason in human affairs. It is tempting to say that everyone has a bit of the Mystic-Humanist in them. I would find nothing silly in someone describing themselves as a Mystic-Pagan-Humanist or a Mystic Christian-Humanist and so forth. We have to remember that within Unitarianism, none of the different strands can claim to be the

central tendency. As a Humanist, I do urge other Humanists (not all of whom would lay claim to mystical experiences at any level) to embrace the fact that they are as much entitled to emotions as anyone else. You do not always have to use the word "emotive" with a frown. You are entitled to emote. You are entitled to enthuse. To celebrate Nature with Pagan zeal, or to celebrate human life, reminding us of Human Rights and Human Responsibilities. Above all to inspire us with the love of Sweet Reason, which we are all are going to need if we are going to save the planet and ourselves. Sensation of the Mystical ("found poetry"). The most beautiful and profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. It is the sower of all true science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead. To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their primitive forms - this knowledge, this feeling, is at the center of true religion.

### ABORTION – RU486: LEGAL OR NOT?

Vicky Potempa

The first doctor in Australia licensed to dispense RU486...has now stopped doing so until she receives legal clarification of her position While she is licensed by the federal government the state law is unclear. (*The Australian* 13/6/09)



This follows a 19 year old Cairns woman being charged with procuring an abortion: she used RU486 at 20 weeks, after responsibly deciding she was too young to have a child. She is the first person in 50 years to be charged with the offense. Her partner has also been charged, with procuring and supplying drugs to procure an abortion. They have been charged under sections 225 and 226 of the Qld criminal code which relates to abortion, and not as the Qld premier has stated with importation of a drug – a legal drug anyway, are all persons who obtain a prescribed medication overseas and return with it to Australia committing a crime? (information via Vicky Potempa: summarized from *The Australian* 13/6/09 and 12/6/09)

### PUGWASH CONFERENCES ON SCIENCE & WORLD AFFAIRS

Adam Breasley

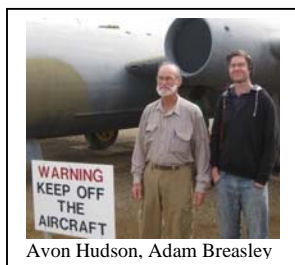
The Pugwash Conferences on Science and World Affairs, who jointly won the 1995 Nobel Peace Prize together with their co-founder and long time



president Sir Joseph Rotblat, making the first time that the prize had been split between an organization and an individual, arose out of the 'Russell-Einstein Manifesto' penned by Bertrand Russell and signed by Einstein (perhaps the last thing that Einstein signed before his death, as Russell received Einstein's signature after hearing the news of Einstein's death) and other prominent scientists many of whom were Nobel Prize winners, which called for a world free from the threat of nuclear weapons and war. The manifesto released by Russell at a press conference argued that since nuclear weapons could not be un-invented, and that should conflict break out some would inevitably seek to use them, that humanity must now make a stark choice, between a world without war or no world at all, or as the manifesto put it 'the risk of universal death.' The manifesto called on world governments and citizens to 'learn to think in a new way', to 'remember your humanity, and forget the rest.' An international conference of scientists followed the Manifesto, held in 1957 in the small town of Pugwash, Nova Scotia, to appraise the dangers of a nuclear weapons arms race and the effects of radiation.

Joseph Roblat was the youngest scientist to participate and chaired the Pugwash meeting. Rotblat was the only scientist to resign from the Manhattan Project to develop the first atomic weapon, leaving for ethical reasons when it became clear that Germany would not succeed in developing the bomb and that the bomb being developed by the Manhattan Project was therefore destined to be used to subdue Russia and would likely be employed against Japan. Rotblat therefore started a tradition continued by subsequent Pugwash conferences and reflected in the Russell-Einstein Manifesto, of the social responsibility of scientists towards humanity and for their scientific works. Before he died in August 2005 Rotblat proposed the idea of a kind of Hippocratic Oath as in the medical profession, but for scientists.

Since the 1957 Pugwash conference, also attended by Sir Mark Oliphant from Australia, subsequent Pugwash conferences have been held annually (and sometimes more often) ever since and their 'Track II' diplomatic efforts bringing people together behind the scenes to solve humanity's conflicts have been widely influential in much of the international security architecture, such as the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty as well as in bringing an end to the Vietnam War, and facilitating dialogue even today in conflict areas such as Kashmir, and between Iran and USA, and DPRK and the Six-Party-Talks. Pugwash and Sir Joseph Rotblat were recognized for their efforts by the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1995, the prize acceptance speech for the Pugwash



Avon Hudson, Adam Breasley

organization given by John Holdren, today one of the chief science advisors for the Obama administration.

The year 2008 marked the centennial birth anniversary of Sir Joseph Rotblat (1908-2005) and was celebrated with the release of a film "The Strangest Dream" covering the life of Sir Joseph Rotblat and the work of Pugwash, released by the National Film Board of Canada.

### MEMBER NEWS

Angela Drury

A warm welcome to NEW MEMBERS (from Jan to June 09) Lachlan Adair, Dylan Anderson, Christine Counsel (celebrant), Douglas Dunstan, Helen Fearnley, Jonathan Head, Maxwell Taylor, Ross Consterdine, Trevor Mott, Michael Holt, Lucas Arundell, Joel Wilson, David Horner, Jonathan Marshall, Andrew Wilson, Trevor Mott, Frank Gomez, Marco Fabiani, Susan Quine, Linda Pillinger, Emma Hannah, Lynne Hall, David Schama, Peter & Rita Coleman, Franklin Scarf, Les Morris, Annette Anderson, Murray Love, Matthew Meurer (member of WA Humanists relocating to NSW), Gerry & Barbara Carrard, and Kay Labor.



We have also had a high number of enquiries (6-7 per month) which enables us to disseminate information about the Society even if a membership application does not result (about 10-20% "success" rate).

Sincere thanks to the following members for GENEROUS DONATIONS: Sue Molesworth, Michael Peters, Thomas Ong, Lee Rhiannon, Jim George, Nan Marsh, Ross Consterdine, Angela Jones, and Matthew Meurer.

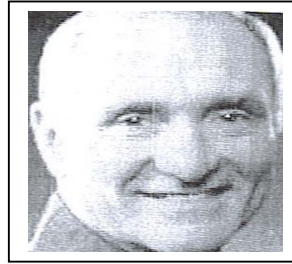
Members Jack Goodyear and Daphne Arnold have died, and we also bid a sad farewell to honorary life member Joan Carey, who was a personal friend. She died in April. We have sent messages of sympathy from the Society. Joan was active in peace organisations such as Save our Sons (in the Vietnam War), People for Nuclear Disarmament and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. I attended her memorial service where the celebrant was Dr Keith Suter, and Lee Rhiannon MLC also spoke and paid tribute.

**REMINDER THAT ALL MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS ARE DUE JULY 1**

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## OUR PATRONS



**Robyn Williams AM**

*Australian Humanist of the Year 1993, Member of the Order of Australia 1988, a talented actor, science journalist and broadcaster, Robyn, presents Radio National's Science Show, Ockham's Razor and In Conversation. Robyn has written more than 10 books and received an Honorary Doctorate in Science from the Universities of Sydney, Macquarie and Deakin.*



**Dorothy Buckland-Fuller AM**

*Mother, bilingual sociologist, peace activist. Dorothy is also an environmentalist, a feminist and committed to the cause of reconciliation with indigenous Australia. As founder of the Ethnic Communities Council Dorothy was, and is still, a vital influence in the ethnic communities.*

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